

No. III. ('Ibis,' 1909, p. 74).

- P. 79. *LAMPROCOLIUS CHALYBÆUS* (Ehr.).—The birds from Tembura and Wau, in the Bahr-el-Ghazal, are *L. CHALCURIUS* (Nordm.), in which the tail is strongly glossed with reddish violet. The female from Tawela, on the Nile, is *L. CHALYBÆUS*, with no violet on the tail, and agrees in this with all other specimens from that river.
- P. 82. *CAMAROPTERA BREVICAUDATA* (Rüpp.).—If *C. GRISEOVIRIDIS* (v. Müll.) is distinct, these two birds should stand under the latter name.
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XIX.—*Notes on some Birds observed on the Trans-Siberian Railway Line.* By Staff-Surgeon KENNETH H. JONES, R.N.

As a means of transit from the Far East to Europe, the Trans-Siberian Railway is now so well known that it is unnecessary to say much about it as a highway.

Commencing at Vladivostok, on the Pacific coast of North-eastern Asia, it runs both east and north across Manchuria and Transbaikalia, through ten degrees of latitude, to Irkutsk, near the south-western shore of Lake Baikal, and thence almost due west over the great Siberian Plain to the Ural Mountains. After crossing the Urals into Europe, the line continues in a westerly direction for about two days' journey and then turns northward to reach Moscow. As a means of making a land-journey with ease and rapidity through many degrees of longitude, over a wide tract of the Palearctic Region, and through the areas of distribution of many species of birds, it offers unequalled facilities to the ornithologist.

Moreover, birds, of all the wild inhabitants of this region, alone give an opportunity to an observer of making notes from the train itself, and this the more easily because of the slow progress and of the many, and often lengthy, stoppages which occur—frequently in the woods and steppes themselves.

It is, of course, an unavoidable misfortune that as the train

runs by night, as well as by day, the traveller misses about two hundred miles during the darkness out of every twenty-four hours' journey, in the month of June. As this article is devoted to the birds observed from the line, I have only mentioned in it such features of the landscape through which I passed as may serve for a setting to the avifauna, with the names of some of the more important towns, in order that those who care to do so may note roughly the region referred to from day to day. I do not pretend that even with the aid of good binoculars it is possible to identify all the species which are seen, and many, of course, must escape notice altogether. At the same time a fair acquaintance with the birds of the Palæarctic Region, and the assistance of Mr. Dresser's invaluable work on the subject, have enabled me to make sufficient notes to be, I venture to hope, of some utility.

Nothing is more interesting than to notice the transition from the range of one species into that of another, so that in some cases, within an hour, it is possible to see the last of the one and the first of the other. Indeed, I think, from what I saw, that species tended to disappear suddenly at the limit of their area of distribution, as often as they did to gradually diminish in number, till they eventually vanished from the landscape altogether.

On the afternoon of June 1st I left Vladivostok, and the line at first ran through badly cultivated country covered with low scrub and the remains of silver-birch forest, having an arm of the sea on the left-hand side.

Carrion-Crows (*Corvus corone*) were much in evidence and by the shore Black-eared Kites (*Milvus melanotis*) were not uncommon. The Tree-Sparrow (*Passer montanus*) was abundant and apparently just as parasitic on man here as it is in China. The Eastern Common Swallow (*Hirundo gutturalis*), and the Nepalese Swallow (*H. striolata*) were plentiful at all the stations, and the nests of both species often adorned the eaves of the same building. Apparently the Nepalese Swallow is here a later breeding bird than the other species, for none of its nests appeared to be

completed; at the same time I do not think that *H. gutturalis* had eggs; incubation, I am sure, had not commenced.

Herring-Gulls, probably *Larus vegæ*, were fairly numerous on the arm of the sea mentioned above.

June 2nd.—To-day the line ran through Manchuria, and the character of the country changed considerably, being hilly and well wooded, chiefly with silver-birch trees and firs, whilst rivers, though plentiful, were rather small and cultivation was scarce. Both species of Swallows were again seen, but only at the stations on the line. Sparrows were visible, but in much smaller numbers than yesterday.

The Daurian Jackdaw (*Corvus dauricus*) put in its first appearance to-day, but I only saw one or two individuals. Carrion-Crows (*Corvus corone*) were abundant, of Magpies (*Picus caudata*) there was a fair sprinkling, and I saw a few Streak-eyed Wagtails (*Motacilla ocularis*). Of Kites I saw only one, *Milvus melanotis*, but of Buzzards I observed several, while in some places Marsh-Harriers were quite numerous. Kestrels and Sparrow-Hawks were noticed, but not in any numbers.

The Eastern Ring-Dove (*Turtur orientalis*) was seen occasionally; the birds were always in pairs. In the late afternoon we ran into the large well-cultivated plain in which stands the town of Harbin. Here Carrion-Crows began to be scarce and the Eastern Rook (*C. pastinator*) put in its first appearance. The Rooks were very numerous, while their nests were observed on many of the trees near the line and round the houses of the natives; but I saw nothing at all like a rookery, such as we know at home, perhaps from the want of sufficient trees growing together in one place. Magpies also increased considerably in numbers in this part of the country, but I did not see many of their nests.

June 3rd.—In the morning we found ourselves in a rolling grassy country, beautifully green, but with very few trees, and apparently almost uninhabited. Here I saw a few Daurian Starlings (*Sturnia sturnina*), but only near the stations, and here also I first noticed the Daurian Stonechats (*Pratincola maura*) in great numbers and evidently breeding.

Wheatears were very numerous, sitting on the telegraph-wires along the route, but whether of the Common or the Isabelline form, it was impossible to say. I think, however, of the latter. I saw also many Thick-billed Shrikes (*Lanius tigrinus*), which likewise seemed very partial to the telegraph-wires. Marsh-Harriers were numerous. Here I first observed a few Lapwings (*Vanellus vulgaris*), which evidently had eggs or young, for I saw one bird fiercely chasing a Carrion-Crow away from the vicinity of its piece of territory. Skylarks were fairly numerous. Kestrels were unusually abundant.

About noon we began to traverse a rather more sandy country and at the same time the landscape became quite flat. Here Skylarks were abundant and I saw also Pallas's Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella piscoletta*), a bird I knew very well in Shantung. At 2.30 p.m. we reached Khailar, which stands in a sandy plain on the edge of an arm of the great Gobi Desert.

After leaving this place I saw many Mongolian Larks (*Melanocorypha mongolica*), while Pallas's Short-toed Larks became more numerous. Here also Kestrels and the Eastern Red-footed Falcon (*Falco amurensis*) became very abundant: the latter frequents similar localities in Shantung. I saw one Ringed Plover, but of which species I am not sure. The country, it must be understood, is not an absolute desert, for though sandy it is covered with abundance of wiry grass.

About an hour after leaving Khailar we came to a curious region in which the desert seems to be either advancing or receding, for, although it retained its usual character, the landscape was studded with numbers of fir trees, standing at considerable distances from one another, with here and there two or three together in a sort of clump. This region was characterized by the presence of large numbers of Hoopoes (*Upupa epops*), though after we left it I did not see any more of these birds until we had crossed the Urals into Europe. At 7 p.m. we reached Manchuria Station, which is the last in Chinese Territory.

June 4th.—In the morning we found ourselves in Trans-

baikalia, a very beautiful country, well wooded and with rapid clear rivers such as are seen in Wales and Scotland, but on a larger scale. In the forenoon I saw the Eastern House-Martin (*Chelidon lagopoda*) at a station, but I never noticed this species again.

To-day Daurian Jackdaws were in great abundance and in the afternoon I noticed with them an occasional example of *Corvus neglectus*, the eastern form of the Common Jackdaw, according to Dresser. Carrion-Crows were rather scarce. I twice saw Black-eared Kites (*Milvus melanotis*). Buzzards were fairly plentiful and I saw one or two Moor-hens on the pools by the side of the line. At dusk I saw an example of *Bubo maximus* on the top of a dead tree.

June 5th.—In the morning the train had arrived at the southern end of Lake Baikal, the mountains on the eastern side of which were in full view.

There was much drift-ice, in large blocks, on the shores of the lake, and numerous ice-floes on its surface, at some distance from the land. There were many Herring-Gulls by the shores of the lake or floating on its surface, but whether they were *Larus vegæ* or *L. cachinnans* it was impossible to make out, especially as the majority were in immature plumage. Buzzards were fairly plentiful, and of Black-eared Kites I observed one or two. Here I saw the only Raven (*Corvus corax*) which I noticed throughout the journey and a few Carrion-Crows (*C. corone*). What I took to be the Baikal White Wagtail (*Motacilla baicalensis*) was abundant near the lake-side. Common Swallows (*Hirundo gutturalis*) were fairly numerous near the stations, but the other species (*H. striolata*) had disappeared. To-day I saw the last of the Daurian Jackdaws and indeed of the Eastern Jackdaw (*Corvus neglectus*) also for a time. We got to Irkutsk, the capital of Siberia, about 2 P.M. on this day, and here I noticed *Passer montanus* and saw what I believed to be *P. domesticus*.

June 6th.—After leaving Irkutsk and until reaching the Ural Mountains, a distance of some thousands of miles, the country is either quite flat or very gently undulating, chiefly the former. June 6th was rather uninteresting; in the fore-

noon we passed through a country absolutely flat, but well wooded with silver-birch and fir trees, and in the afternoon through open prairie land with scattered strips and clumps of wood. In the forenoon I noticed the first Starlings (*Sturnus vulgaris*), and Jackdaws (*Corvus neglectus*) were plentiful. In the more open country Kestrels were numerous and I saw one or two Sparrow-hawks.

June 7th.—In the forenoon I saw the first Grey Crow (*Corvus cornix*), but many others appeared as the day went on. Jackdaws (*C. neglectus*) continued to be numerous, and Magpies, which I had not seen for some days, were again plentiful. Starlings were very abundant, and near every house, elevated on poles or fastened in trees, were little nesting-boxes for these birds, of which they gladly availed themselves. Carrion-Crows were scarce. Swallows were much in evidence and White Wagtails were abundant. I first saw Cuckoos (*Cuculus canorus*) to-day, and they were plentiful. Kestrels also were very numerous. To-day we passed through Mariinsk and Bogatyr.

June 8th.—The morning and forenoon of this day found us in a steppe country which was studded by numerous small shallow lakes fringed with reeds, whilst huge marshes spread on either side of the line as far as we could see.

We passed Kainsk in the forenoon. Ornithologically this day was full of interest and I saw many birds hereabouts which I had not observed elsewhere. Waterfowl, as might be expected, were abundant. Mallards were numerous and almost certainly breeding; and I saw a pair of Grey Lag Geese which probably had a nest, they were not far from the line and seemed quite undisturbed by the proximity of the train.

We passed several colonies of Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*), but these birds were not very numerous. Coots (*Fulica atra*) and Little Grebes (*Podiceps fluviatilis*) were fairly plentiful, and in the drier parts of the country I saw a good many pairs of Lapwings (*Vanellus vulgaris*). In the early afternoon we left the lakes behind us and the train ran through open grassy country with occasional

scattered groves of silver-birch trees, always at some distance from the line. At about 4 P.M. we reached Omsk. In this part of the country Stonechats (*Pratincola maura*) were extremely plentiful: no doubt the locality suited them well for breeding purposes. Here also I saw a great many Hobbies (*Falco subbuteo*); they were very tame and remained sitting on the telegraph-posts whilst the train steamed by. Cuckoos were very numerous and so were Pipits, on which, no doubt, the former were chiefly parasitic. Carrion-Crows, which had become rather scarce, again became numerous in the afternoon, but the Grey Crows continued to be plentiful—even in the marsh-land they did not diminish much. In the afternoon as we neared Omsk I first saw Rooks (*Corvus frugilegus*) and Jackdaws (*C. monedula*), but neither were very plentiful. At Omsk Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) were well to the fore.

June 9th.—From this date until June 11th, when we reached Moscow, birds were not plentiful and I did not make many notes of interest.

In the forenoon we found that as we reached the neighbourhood of Cheliabinsk the country underwent a great change: still flat and grassy, it wore a look of cultivation and civilization greatly in advance of anything that we had seen since passing the well-ordered Manchurian plains about Harbin. Soon after mid-day we entered the Urals, and passed the borderline of Europe and Asia shortly after 4 o'clock. The Ural scenery was pretty but not at all grand: the mountains are neither rugged nor of any great height, but they are most beautifully wooded with forests of conifers.

Birds were scarce, and I only noticed Carrion-Crows, Grey Crows, Rooks, and Jackdaws, chiefly about Cheliabinsk. Starlings continued to be plentiful and in the Urals I saw a couple of Buzzards.

June 10th.—To-day the country was flat and woods were scarce, indeed I only saw one or two small copses of rather undersized oaks. I noticed a Hoopoe, the first I had seen since crossing the Gobi Desert near Khailar, some thousands of miles further east. I noticed the last Black-eared Kite

to-day near Samara. Rooks, Crows, Jackdaws, and Starlings were also very numerous.

June 11th.—This day we reached Moscow, and it seemed curious to see, in the city itself, such birds as the Grey Crow and the Black Kite (*M. migrans*), neither of which were uncommon.

I was disappointed on my journey in not seeing any Thrushes, for I have always looked on Siberia as a stronghold of that family in the breeding-season; no doubt they keep well within the forests at this time of year, which accounts for my failure to observe them.

In conclusion I may say that the climatic conditions were very much the same throughout the journey as they are in Great Britain at the same time of the year, except that at Vladivostok it was abominably hot. I did, however, observe once in Manchuria, and once again in Siberia, some patches of unthawed snow near the railway line.

XX.—*Field-Notes on Vultures and Eagles.*

By Brigadier-General H. R. KELHAM, C.B., M.B.O.U.

COLONEL WILLOUGHBY VERNER'S interesting work on the Wild Birds of Spain recalls to me birds'-nesting days near Gibraltar as far back as 1873, including the finding of nests of the Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) and Bonelli's Eagle (*Nisaëtus fasciatus*), a description of which may be worth recording.

On reference to an old note-book I find:—

“Gibraltar, 15th April, 1873.—This has been one of many delightful days in the cork woods, birds'-nesting with Savile Reid, R.E.

“A short time ago, while hunting with the Calpe Hounds, we noticed Egyptian Vultures and a pair of Bonelli's Eagles sailing about some crags a few miles from the town of San Roque. To-day we revisited the spot.

“Riding up a sandy ravine, the steep scrub-clad hills on